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Ancient Kingdoms in Land of War

By ISMA'IL KUSHKUSH

KHARTOUM, Sudan — Every winter they come and go, like birds migrating south. Most of them nest in downtown Khartoum's old [Acropole Hotel](#), but they're not here to rest. They're here to work in Sudan's blistering deserts, and the past few years have yielded outstanding results.

For many people around the world, Sudan conjures images of war, instability, drought and poverty. All of those things exist here, often in tragic abundance. But lost in the narrative are the stories of the ancient kingdoms of Kush and Nubia that once rivaled Egypt, Greece and Rome.

Lost to many, that is, but not to the archaeologists who have been coming here for years, sometimes decades, to help unearth that history.

"Sudan is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that has real archaeology and local teams working," said Claude Rilly, the director of the French Archaeological Unit in Sudan.

Though its historical importance has long been overshadowed by Egypt, its neighbor to the north, Sudan's archaeological record is pivotal to understanding the history of Africa itself, experts say, and a wave of new discoveries may be adding crucial new information.

"The history of Sudan can play a role for Africa that Greece played for the history of Europe," Mr. Rilly said enthusiastically. "People have been living here for 5,000 years" along the Nile, he added. "It is difficult not to find something."

One overlooked fact is that Sudan has more pyramids than Egypt, in places like Nuri and Bijrawiyah, though they are smaller and not as old. In the town of Sedeinga in northern Sudan, for instance, Mr. Rilly and others excavated 35 small pyramids in the past few years, a discovery that points to what he called an ancient "democratization of pyramids."

"Anyone who could afford it built one," he said. "It was for social distinction."

The pyramids at Sedeinga are built close together. Made of mud brick, they range in height from under three feet for children to as high as 32 feet for nobles.

Not far from Sedeinga is the town of Dukki Gel, where a Swiss archaeologist, Charles Bonnet, has been working in the area for 44 years. He focuses on the ancient civilization of Kerma — so much so that his friends call him Charles "Kerma" Bonnet — which flourished around 1500 B.C. Mr. Bonnet's colleagues say that his research has greatly added to the understanding of 1,000 years of Sudan's ancient history.

“I discovered a Nubian city in Dukki Gel with original African architecture from around 1500 B.C., and in a cache we found 40 pieces of seven monumental statues of black pharaohs,” Mr. Bonnet said. In late 2012, he found what he believes are the city’s walls.

At the height of its military power around 750 B.C., the ancient kingdom of Kush in northern Sudan ruled over Egypt and [Palestine](#), inaugurating what historians call the rule of the 25th dynasty and the black pharaohs.

In the heartland of the Kush kingdom, Richard Lobban Jr., an American archaeologist who has been visiting Sudan since 1970, works mostly in the area of the [Island of Meroe](#), which was added to Unesco’s [World Heritage](#) sites in 2011. Along with colleagues from Russia and Italy, Mr. Lobban uncovered an ancient and previously unknown Merotic temple in late 2011.

“The orientation of the temple has the sun directly pouring into the temple twice a year,” said Mr. Lobban, suggesting that it was dedicated to the ancient Egyptian sun god Amun.

Ancient Meroe, known today as Bijrawiyah, was a second capital in the kingdom of Kush from around 300 B.C. to 350 A.D. It was a major center for iron smelting, earning it the nickname “the Birmingham of Africa” by historians. Meroe was often ruled by queens, known by the title “kandake,” and boasts scores of pyramids similar in shape to the one exhibited on a one-dollar bill.

“We hope to excavate further and deeper and find still more of the missing pieces of this ancient puzzle,” Mr. Lobban said.

As fruitful as it may be, archaeology in Sudan faces many challenges, including the difficulty of protecting sites from development projects. There has even been a literal gold rush, in which many young Sudanese head to the desert in search of gold but occasionally find artifacts instead, leading to a rise in illegal trade in relics.

“Someone was arrested recently for trying to smuggle a statue,” says Abdel-Rahman Ali, director general of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.

Financing archaeological efforts has also been low on the list of priorities for the Sudanese government, but in February the government signed a \$135 million agreement with Qatar that would provide money for 27 archaeological missions, the renovation of the Sudan National Museum and the development of tourism projects.

“Archaeology in Sudan is getting ready for a boom,” says Geoff Emberling, an archaeologist from the University of Michigan, who has been working in the town of [El Kurru](#).

The impact of new archaeological discoveries has generated interest beyond the ring of specialists.

Since South Sudan split off from Sudan in 2011, Sudan’s economy has been hard hit because most

of the oil is in the south. In January 2012, South Sudan shut off production in a dispute with Sudan. An agreement between both countries now promises to send the oil through the north for a fee, but some in Sudan have been searching for new sources of hard currency, including tourism.

Sohaib Elbadawi is a member of Sudan Archaeological Society and heads a private group working on establishing a five-star resort near the ancient site of Jebel Barkal.

Showing a model of the project in his office in downtown Khartoum, Mr. Elbadawi said that foreigners told him, “ ‘You have a history, but you don’t know how to market yourself.’ ” “There are voices rising in Sudan that tourism should be a source of income for the country after separation,” Mr. Elbadawi added optimistically.

Sudanese archaeologists are also conscious of current opportunities.

“We have been working to illuminate Sudanese heritage through exhibitions held abroad, such as in France and Germany, and we are planning for exhibitions in Qatar, Japan and Korea,” said Mr. Ali of the National Corporation for Antiquities.

Of course, it will take years for Sudan to turn itself into a tourism attraction, if it ever can. The lack of fully developed infrastructure and facilities, United States sanctions that bar the use of major credit cards, a maddening bureaucracy and, above all, political instability stand in the way.

But archaeologically speaking, the bounty is evident.

“This is a land of great history indeed,” said Mr. Lobban.

A LOST EMPIRE REDISCOVERED

Anonymous

(Investigator 124, 2009 January)

FORGOTTEN EMPIRE

An empire ignored by historians but implied in the Bible has been rediscovered.

Cush was the ancient Egyptian name for the land to Egypt's south, now identified with southern Nubia (the Nile valley of Sudan). The civilization of Cush flourished for 2500 years and built more pyramids than Egypt – 300 are known compared to 60 in Egypt.

The Bible implies Cush ruled an empire because Cush:

1. Invaded Judah twice (II Chronicles 14:9-13; II Kings 19:9) which would have required the defeat of Egypt;
2. Is called in the Bible "a nation mighty and conquering" (Isaiah 18:1-2);
3. Challenged the great Assyrian Empire (II Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9).

According to the Bible Cush was a grandson of Noah through Noah's son Ham. (Genesis 10:6-8; I Chronicles 1:8-10) Cush's descendants settled in Mesopotamia (Genesis 2:13), Arabia (Habakkuk 3:7), and Africa.

The Cushites we're concerned with were dark-skinned people (Jeremiah 13:23) south of Egypt. The King James Bible translates the Hebrew "Kush" as "Ethiopia" – an error that resulted because Africa was virtually unknown. Some recent translations have "Sudan" or "Cush".

In 1913 to 1916 Harvard Egyptologist George A. Reisner (1867-1942) discovered a previously unknown Sudanese civilization and the first archaeological evidence that Cushite kings ruled Egypt.

Reisner concluded black Africans could not have built the monuments he was finding and that therefore Cush was an Egyptian outpost and its people slaves of Egypt. Cushite rulers of Egypt, Reisner thought, were light-skinned Egyptians who had intermarried with Blacks.

The *Modern World Encyclopaedia* (1935) mentions neither Cush nor its greatest ruler, Taharqa. Egyptologists Keith Seele and George Steindorff in *When Egypt Ruled the East* (1942) devoted only three sentences to Cushite pharaohs of Egypt.

Historians generally believed there's no history in Cush. The picture started changing with archaeological salvage efforts during the building of Egypt's Aswan Dam in the 1960s.

REDISCOVERED

Charles Bonnet excavated the abandoned city of Kerma near the Third Cataract of the Nile. He gained international attention in 2003 upon discovering seven stone statues of Cushite pharaohs.

Kerma was the main city of Cush from 2500 to 1502 BC. Its cemetery has 30,000 graves. Deceased rulers were laid in multi-roomed tombs and surrounded by hundreds of servants ritually-sacrificed.

Kerma traded in ivory, gold, jewelry and bronze artifacts, managed extensive farmlands and herds, and manufactured pottery.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Ancient Kush Rivalled Egypt, experts say

Archaeologists have unearthed a 4,000-year-old gold-processing centre along the middle Nile in Sudan that suggests the ancient kingdom of Kush was much larger than scholars previously believed and would have rivalled the domain of the Egyptians to the north.

Kush, which was called Nubia by the Greeks, was the first urban civilization in sub-Saharan Africa. The discovery of the gold centre and a related graveyard is providing new information about...the capital city, Kerma...

Believed to have flourished from about 2400 BC until the 2nd century AD, Kush "is gradually coming out of the shadow of Egypt," said archaeologist Derek A. Welsby of the British Museum...
(June 19, 2007)

By 2000BC Cush occupied 650 miles of the Nile valley, as much as Egypt did.

Egypt built huge forts to protect its southern frontier but abandoned them around 1750 and Cushite forces moved in. An inscription at El Kab reveals that around 1650 the Cushites rampaged through Egypt and reached the Nile Delta. No known Egyptian inscription, however, records this defeat.

Egypt under its 18th Dynasty (1539-1292) regained dominance. Pharaoh Thutmose I won decisively in 1502 and destroyed Kerma. A layer of ash and mud-bricks fired red are evidence of the destruction.

Egyptian viceroys ruled Cush, forts and temples were built across the land, and children of elite Cushites were educated in Egypt. Cush adopted Egyptian language, burial customs, and gods, and began building pyramids.

The Bible says little about Cush in this period – only that Moses had a Cushite wife. (Numbers 12:1)

CUSH RECOVERS

Egypt's control of Cush ended about 1100BC, but Cush retained Egyptian culture and religion. A new kingdom of Cush arose.

Biblical comment regarding this period states that:

- David's military commander Joab had a Cushite slave around 1000BC. (II Samuel 18:21-32)
- When Rehoboam (David's grandson) ruled Israel (c.920) Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and his army included Cushites. (II Chronicles 12:1-4)
- Cushites led by "Zerah" invaded Judah when Asa was king (c.900). (II Chronicles 14:9-13) The Cushites would have had to advance through Egypt – but as yet there's no proof of Cushite control over Egypt at this period.

By 750 Egypt, according to secular history, was militarily weak. It was ruled by Libyans and petty warlords, its culture and religion in ruins.

In 730 Cushite forces under Piye conquered Upper Egypt. His successor conquered the rest of Egypt (712) and founded Egypt's 25th Dynasty. Black pharaohs reunited Egypt, regenerated Egyptian culture, and ruled Egypt until 656. The Cushite Empire stretched from Khartoum to the Mediterranean.

The fourth Cushite pharaoh, Taharqa (721-664), is mentioned in the Bible as "Tirhakah". He reigned 26 years (690-664) and built numerous monuments from Napata (Cush's capital) to Egypt's delta.

In 701 Assyria invaded Judah. (See Investigator #71) The Bible reports that "King" Tirhakah intervened (II Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9) but apparently was defeated. Tirhakah was not actually "king" in 701, but commander of the army. Probably the Bible uses his later royal title because that's how subsequent generations referred to him.

The Assyrians under King Esarhaddon attacked Egypt in 674 but the Cushites beat them back. The Assyrians returned in 671 and after bloody battles took Memphis. In conquered towns Esarhaddon erected "piles of their heads". The Assyrians transported cattle, horses and captives to Assyria "in countless numbers" including Taharqa's royal family. Isaiah wrote:

So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians [Cushites] as exiles, both the young and the old... (ch.20)

Taharqa escaped to Cush but returned in 669 and slaughtered the Assyrian garrisons. A third Assyrian invasion (665BC) recaptured Memphis and advanced to Thebes. Taharqa again fled to Cush where he died.

AFTER TAHARQA

Taharqa's stepson Tantamani retook Egypt from Assyria and became Egypt's last black pharaoh. Again the Assyrians returned and defeated the Cushites.

After that Assyria itself declined. Egypt regained independence and invaded Cush (590BC).

Meanwhile in Mesopotamia the Babylonian Empire arose. Under King Nebuchadnezzar it conquered Egypt in 588. The Bible describes the devastation of Egypt and says Cushites took part. (Ezekiel 29:10-14; 30:4, 5, 9-12; Jeremiah 46:2, 9)

In 539 the Persian Empire conquered Babylon and reached Cush in 522. The Bible says Persia ruled from India to Cush. (Esther 1:1; 8:9)

Besides references to Cush's history the Old Testament also prophesied about Cush's future:

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush... (Isaiah 11:10-11)

The "Root of Jesse" was a future Jewish ruler understood by Christians to be Christ. Therefore, at some stage after Christ lived, Jews from many lands, including Cush, would return to Israel.

Zephaniah 3:9-10 indicates that in Cush people will serve God. Possibly this occurred with the Jewish presence in Cush or in the 6th to 14th centuries AD when the area was Christianized.

Daniel 11:43 mentions Cush at the "time of the end".

Ezekiel 38:5 predicts a final attack on Israel by numerous nations, including Cush.

CONCLUSION

The rediscovery of Cush is threatened by Sudan's Merowe Dam hydroelectric scheme which will create a 150km-long lake. European, American and Sudanese archaeologists are hurriedly examining ancient remains facing inundation. The Gdansk Archaeological Museum alone surveyed 700 sites in just one year.

The past century has seen hundreds of claims in the Bible confirmed by science. If even an empire could become lost and rediscovered, then what else?

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THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Kush

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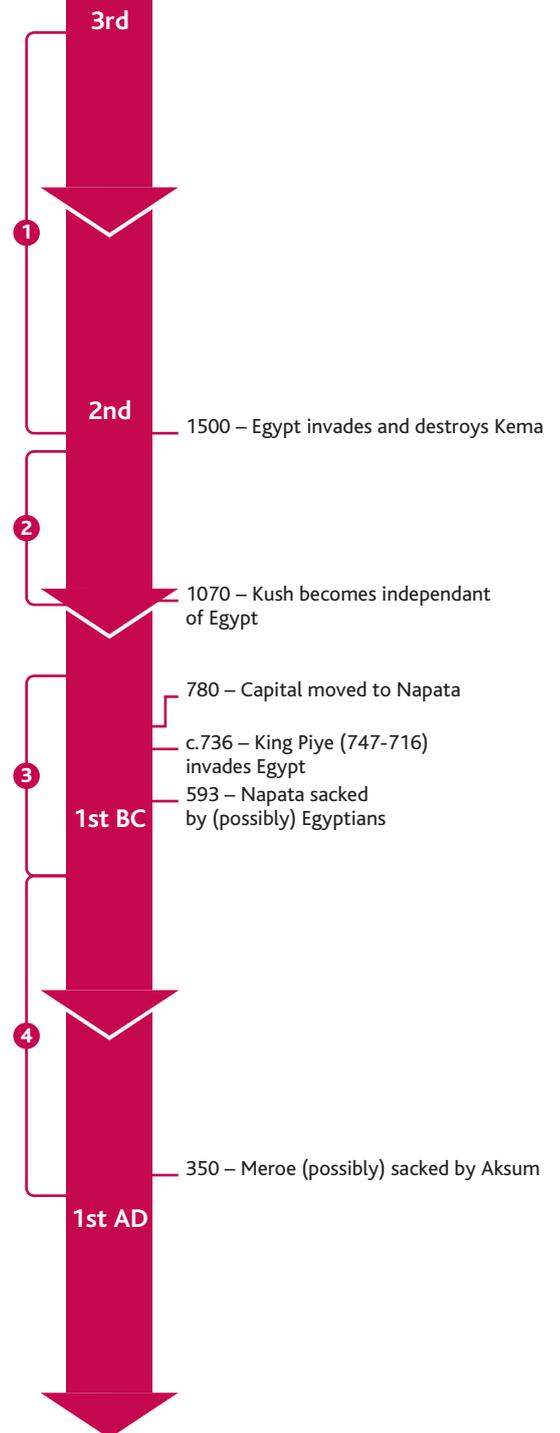
www.britishmuseum.org

KINGDOM OF KUSH



Millennium BC

- 1 Kerma 2500–1500
- 2 Egyptian New Kingdom 1550–1069
- 3 2nd Kingdom of Kush, Napatan period 9th c.–4th c.
- 4 Meroitic period 4th c. BC–4th c. AD



Millennium AD

SHEET 1: WHAT WAS THE CITY OF KERMA LIKE?

The outline of the city of Kerma, the first capital of Kush, has slowly been emerging from the sand. It appears that it was made up of several different sectors, each with a particular function.

Source 1

Other inhabitants of the city appear to have lived in houses of irregular layouts that were clustered in four separate residential districts. These houses are of different sizes and are noted for their courtyards and gardens.

Bianchi 2004: 83

Source 2

The royal city [Kerma] was surrounded by substantial fortifications, including a wall 10 metres high. Four gateways gave access to the city, and roadways linked the gates and main structures. Many of the houses were of the traditional circular plan, of grass on a wooden frame, but others were rectangular of stone construction, and some of mud brick. Charles Bonnet has estimated that there were some 150 or 200 households, perhaps as many as 2,000 people living here.

Morkot 2000: 66

Source 4

The central block reserved for the owner had two or three floors, reached by a staircase. Dozens of jars were stored in the basements. These held cereals (sorghum) and dried fish. Around the main building were kitchens with large bread ovens, and quarters for family members or for servants.

Wealthy houses in the city, described by Bonnet 1986: 11

Source 6

There was a large building, circular in plan, with a conical roof, the height of which dominated the townscape. It may have served as Kerma's royal audience hall. It was surrounded by a series of smaller huts, some almost 5 metres in diameter.

Bianchi 2004: 85

Source 7

All around [the Deffufa were] large avenues, along which were the houses of the high officials of the kingdom. In fact, the size of certain houses suggests there was an elite class that watched the areas where goods were sealed and trade took place. Several bakeries with batteries of ovens have been found, where bread and probably beer were prepared for use as offerings.

Welsby and Anderson 2004: 80



Source 3: Model of city with Deffufa (white building)
© www.kerma.ch



Source 5: Temple
© www.kerma.ch



Source 8: Circular audience chamber, and deffufa
© www.kerma.ch

Task

Make a brochure for tourists visiting the city of Kerma in 1700 BC.

SHEET 2: WHAT WAS THE DEFFUFA?

The Western Deffufa rises out of the desert at Kerma looking a bit like, in its decayed state, an outcrop of natural rock. It is, however, clearly man-made and archaeologists have been puzzling over its exact purpose and significance. Here are some of their theories.

Source 1

The Western Deffufa is one of the most extraordinary structures in Nubia [Kush] and the only one of its kind. Originally, it was a solid rectangular mass of mud brick more than 150 feet long and 75 five feet wide, and probably stood considerably higher than the 60 feet that are still preserved. Within this solid mass there were no rooms and only the remains of a narrow winding stairway which had evidently led to the top of the structure.

Adams 1977: 199–200

Source 3

Reisner thought the Western Deffufa was the fortified residence of an Egyptian governor general of Upper Nubia... More recently, Hintze has suggested that the Deffufa was not Egyptian at all but part of the palace of the king of Kush, built by his orders.

Trigger 1976: 13–14

Source 4

The Deffufa is certainly not a fortress, however... Here surely is one of the depots or factories from which emerged the great Nile trade. It seems clear to me that the Kerma Deffufa was designed as an enormous watchtower... It would undoubtedly be to the advantage of the king and his officers to have first news of the coming of the boats, so as to have the landing parties ready for them.

Adams 1977: 201–202

Source 5

The Western Deffufa, with its extraordinarily thick walls of baked brick seems like the local replica of an Egyptian temple, which its outline suggests.

Bonnet 1986: vi

Source 6

The presence of rooms at all four corners of the building, in particular, did not seem to fit in with its role as a fort. Likewise, the placing of the entrance, surrounded by annexes in which attackers could easily hide, hardly seemed to match the needs of military architecture.

Bonnet 1986: 14



Source 2: Western Deffufa, Kerma
© J Anderson

Questions

1. What are the different explanations for the Deffufa in these sources?
2. Which one seems the most likely, given the description in source 1?

SHEET 3: WAS HUMAN SACRIFICE PRACTISED AT KERMA?

Archaeologists uncovering the burial ground at Kerma came across tombs that were quite unlike those in Egypt. Here there were no grand pyramids – these came later – instead a whole necropolis of shallow burials, some with gruesome secrets.

Source 1

The largest single tumulus [burial mound] at Kerma had a diameter of 90 metres, and the extent of the burial chambers within is greater than that in any Egyptian pyramid. The number of sacrificial human burials within this tomb exceeds that of any other known tomb in the world.

Adams 1984: 49

Source 3

Each of the large tumuli contained a mud brick burial chamber. In at least one of these the ruler was laid out on a bed of glazed quartz; in another the bed was of slate. Besides the main burial chamber there was a large open room. These contained the bodies of up to 400 human beings who appear to have been buried alive. These bodies were accompanied by a few artefacts and many were of women.

Trigger 1976: 16

Source 4

We see a noticeable increase in human sacrifices. One or two adults and up to seven children are sometimes found beside the main subject. On several occasions, a man, lying on a wooden bed, was accompanied by a woman and an adolescent. At the present time, we might suppose that these burials relate to a single family, where certain members agree to follow one of their own in death.

Bonnet 1992: 622

Source 7

Only 16 of the tombs certainly contained extra human burials.

Welsby 1996: 89

Questions

1. What evidence is there for human sacrifice at Kerma?
2. Why might there have been human sacrifice at burials?



Source 2: Large burial mound with ox skulls
© www.kerma.ch



Source 5: Double burial – one of these was probably a sacrificial victim
© www.kerma.ch



Source 6: Burial with sacrifices
© www.kerma.ch



Source 8: Bed
British Museum

SHEET 4: HOW GREAT WAS EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE ON KUSH?

It is perhaps not surprising, given their geographical closeness and historical development, that Egypt and Kush should have had many things in common. Have a look at these examples of art that were discovered in Kush and see if you can spot any similarities.

Source 1

Much that was produced at Kerma was heavily influenced by Egyptian techniques of manufacture and design... The rich at Kerma greatly admired Egyptian civilisation and ordered for their own use skilful copies of Egyptian furniture, jewellery, weapons and even architecture.

Trigger 1976: 14

Source 3

Bonnet admits that he went to Sudan to find Egyptian civilization. 'But step by step,' he confesses, 'I came to understand that the Nubian [Kushite] civilizations are really extraordinary. There might be Egyptian influences, but there is a Nubian originality and a Nubian identity.'

MacLeod 1997: 7

Source 4

Many items of manufacture and design at Kerma have been thought to be products of Egyptian craftsmen fitting in with local tastes. But it is equally possible that local [Kushite] craftsmen used Egyptian techniques to produce goods adapted to their own culture.

O'Connor 1984: 65

Source 6

Throughout their history the Kushite artists were continually borrowing from the current artistic trends in Egypt. [Yet] Kushite art still kept a distinctive character of its own. Kushite artists were clearly not simply stealing ideas but also adapting them, presumably to their own artistic traditions.

Welsby 1996: 177

Questions

1. The three pictures come from Kush. How much are they copying Egyptian styles?
2. How far do the written sources agree that Kush copied from Egypt?
3. Would you agree that Kush did not have an art style of its own?



Source 2: Sphinx with features of Taharqo, ruler of Kush and Egypt



Source 5: Ankh symbol imported into Napata (2nd Kingdom of Kush) British Museum



Source 7: Shabtis of Taharqo British Museum

SHEET 5: HOW SKILLED WERE KUSHITE CRAFTSMEN?

Kush is inevitably compared with Egypt in terms of its arts and crafts. Although we cannot be sure that some of these objects were not imported from Egypt, see if you think they show good craftsmanship.

Source 1

The most distinctive products of the Kerma culture were ceramics. The potters were able to produce incredibly fine vessels by hand, without using a wheel.

British Museum

Source 2

Kush was not totally dependent on Egypt for precious objects for the use of the rich. The relations with Egypt also inspired specialized production at Kerma, where local craftsmen made razors and daggers of bronze, faience vessels, wooden furniture decorated with carved figures of mica and ivory, as well as pots of high artistic value.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 66

Source 3

In the early Kushite period pottery was on the whole rather drab and is comparable with the low level of artistic merit of much of Egyptian ceramics...[Later, under Greek influence] Kushite fine white wares and egg-shell wares are amongst the most competent products of potters of any period in the Nile valley.

Welsby 1996: 163

Task

Search the British Museum's website to find larger versions of these images so that you can decide on the skills of Kushite craftsmen.



Source 4: Bronze razor
(Kerma)
British Museum



Source 5: Bowl (Kerma)
British Museum



Source 6: Cup (Meroe)
British Museum



Source 7: Pottery (Meroe)
British Museum



Source 8: Amphora
(Meroe)
British Museum



Source 9: Faience
perfume vase
(Meroe)
British Museum



Source 10: Gold jackal
(Meroe)
British Museum

SHEET 6: WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT KUSHITE SOCIETY?

Although we are learning more each year about Kushite society, we don't have the same level of knowledge as we do about Egypt. These sources may supply some clues, especially about the power of the rulers.

Source 1

The priests of Meroe were apparently able to decide when the king should die, and by tradition the king accepted their decision as having divine authority.

Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), quoted in Welsby 1996: 32

Source 3

The main centre for the collection and administration of goods seems to have been the royal palaces: the main temples do not appear to have acted as major economic institutions as in Egypt.

Edwards 1998: 186

Source 5

Life expectancy may have been a few years less than the 20–25 year expectancy in Egypt.

Welsby 1996: 51

Source 6

Closely cropped hair is the most common hairstyle. This is sometimes decorated with a small topknot. A number of adult females had nails and hair stained with henna, a method of personal adornment still used in the Sudan today. At Meroe royal ladies are shown on reliefs sporting very long fingernails. Kohl was very commonly used as a cosmetic.

Welsby 1996: 52

Questions

1. What do the statues (source 4 and 8) tell you about the power of the rulers of Kush?
2. What other evidence is there of royal power and control?
3. What else can you learn about Kushite society from these sources?



Source 2: Royal sceptre
British Museum



Source 4: The god
Amun protecting
King Taharqo
British Museum



Source 7: Sandstone relief from south wall of funerary chapel of Queen Shanakdakhete. The queen is enthroned, the prince is behind, and both figures are protected by wings of Isis.
British Museum



Source 8: Head of a king
British Museum



Source 9: Sherd of pottery
with Meroitic writing
British Museum

SHEET 7: HOW IMPORTANT TO KUSH WAS TRADE WITH EGYPT?

Kush occupied a strategic position in terms of trade. Not only was it close to the gold mines, and so could supply this material that Egypt craved, but it also controlled the route along which goods from the heart of the continent passed.

Source 1

The motive for the Egyptian expansion [into Kush] was to take control of the trade in slaves and African exotics such as ebony, ivory, incense, ostrich eggs and feathers, and hides from wild animals, as well as to obtain raw materials such as gold, copper and precious stones.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 60–61

Source 3

Trade (gold, precious stones, ivory, animal hide, ebony, cattle) also contributed to the city's [Kerma] wealth, due to its location in the centre of a fertile basin and at the crossroads of desert routes linking Egypt, the Red Sea and the heart of Africa.

Mission archéologique Suisse au Soudan 2010

Source 4

A text mentions the Kushites' fondness for Egyptian honey, oil, and ointments, as well as for woven garments.

Adams 1984: 41

Source 5

There is no evidence for the working of gold mines by the Kushites, nor of the goldfields... We may assume that forced labour was only one of the means by which Kushites had access to this material: trade with the desert dwellers would have been a more reliable option.

Welsby 1996: 169

Source 7

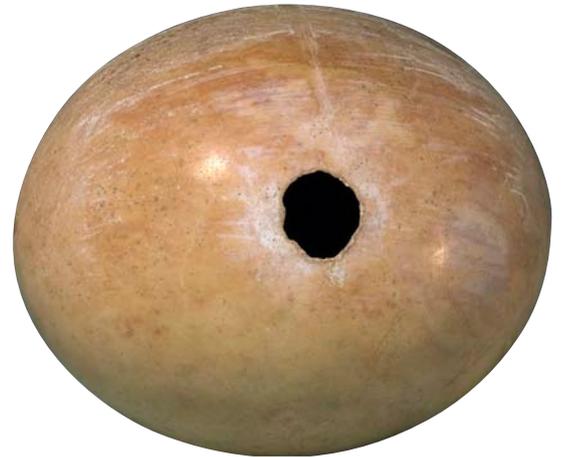
A small, elite group of Egyptian officials oversaw the manufactures and the export trade of Kerma on behalf of the Kushite ruler. They were, however, business rather than military or political figures.

Adams 1977: 216

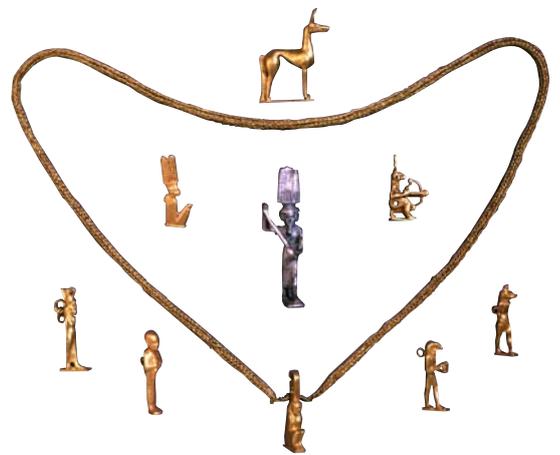
Source 8

The control of the trade networks with the north, as well as the supply of raw materials from the south through trade and raiding, appear to have given a boost to the rise of Kush.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 66



Source 2: Ostrich egg, used for storage
British Museum



Source 6: Kushite gold jewellery
British Museum

Questions

1. Which goods did Egypt want?
2. How was Kush useful to Egypt?
3. How important was Egypt to Kush's prosperity?

SHEET 8: HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE GOVERNMENT IN THE KUSHITE ECONOMY?

As there was no coinage in Kush, historians are unsure how the economy worked. Those who didn't grow food still had to eat, and get paid. In the desert regions, archaeologists have found the remains of large water tanks (hafirs) which suggest that the government took responsibility for water supply.

Source 1

Some scholars believe that the Kushite economy worked as a redistributive system. Surplus produce, collected as taxes, was then shared out by the state. Others think that most people worked the land at subsistence level, contributing nothing to the state and receiving nothing from it.

Welsby 1996: 173

Source 3

There would have been a number of individuals who were not food producers. These included members of the army, the administration, the priesthood and the royal family. We have no evidence to show how these people were paid.

Welsby 1996: 173

Source 4

The climate is not ideal for vines, although limited local production did occur. Twelve structures identified as wine presses have been found in the north of the kingdom... A number of ancient writers record that cotton was grown in Kush.

Welsby 1996: 158–159

Source 6

The main industrial craft in Meroe was smelting of iron and the making of iron tools. Iron provided the farmers and hunters of Meroe with superior tools and weapons. The development and use of iron was thus partly responsible for the very success, growth and wealth of the Meroite kingdom.

Shillington 1995: 43

Source 7

The construction of water tanks involved considerable organisation and mobilisation of workers. As their use in recent times has shown, they would have needed an efficient government system to ensure they were regularly maintained.

Edwards 1998: 185

Source 8

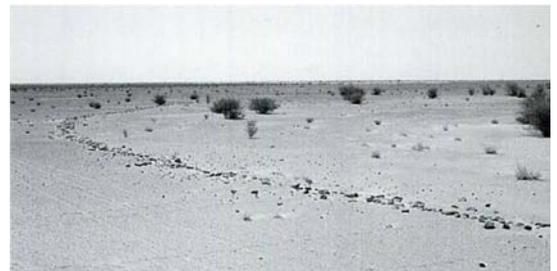
The state [of Kush] showed off its presence at these hafirs [water tanks] by building temples and statues, some of them clearly designed to demonstrate the military power of Kush.

Welsby 1996: 37



Source 2: Ovens

Large groups of these have been discovered near grain stores. This might suggest that the collection of grain, and baking and distribution of bread, may have been organised by the state
© www.kerma.ch

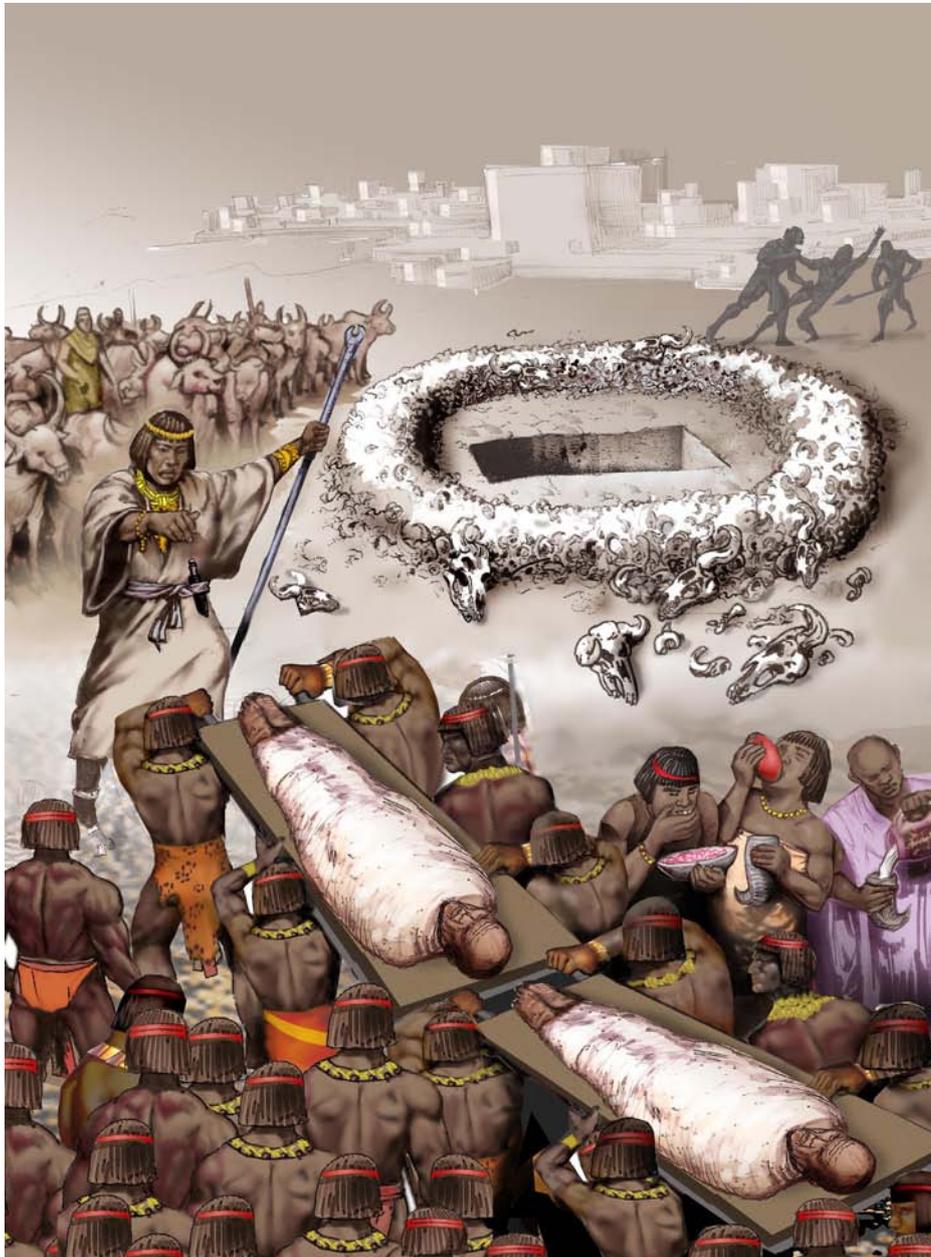


Source 5: Wall of a hafir at Basa

Questions

1. What did Kush produce?
2. How was the problem of water solved?
3. What evidence is there that the state organised the economy?

SHEET 9: BURIAL AT KERMA



Source 1: Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

Questions

1. Describe what is happening in this picture
2. Is everyone happy to be accompanying the King into the tomb?
3. Why might some of these people be glad to be buried with the King?
4. What does this tell you about Kushite society?

Your feedback

Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

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The Museum's collection of over 200,000 African objects includes material from ancient to contemporary cultures. Highlights on display throughout the Museum include a magnificent brass head of a Yoruba ruler from Ife in Nigeria, vibrant textiles from across the continent, and the Throne of Weapons – a sculpture made out of guns.

For students

Students can experience and engage with the collection in many ways, from taking part in activity sessions at the Museum to using free online resources or playing interactive games in the classroom and at home.

For teachers

Search the Museum's collection online at www.britishmuseum.org for information about objects, including pictures to download or print.

Schools and teachers newsletter

Sign up to the schools and teachers newsletter to receive regular updates on free special exhibitions previews, teacher events and new free resources at www.britishmuseum.org/schools

Ancient Civilizations websites

These award-winning British Museum websites have been specially designed for students in Years 5 and 6. Each site is supported by information and guidance for teachers. www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk

The CarAf Centre

These resources have been produced by the British Museum in collaboration with The CarAf Centre, a community educational support centre and registered charity based in the London Borough of Camden. For more information, visit www.thecarafcentre.org.uk

**THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM**

Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
📍 Holborn, Russell Square, Tottenham Court Road
Telephone +44 (0)20 7323 8000
information@britishmuseum.org
www.britishmuseum.org